

Celebrating 25 years of supporting writers in education

It's been a year of celebrations. As the London Olympics got underway, the headlines went to Danny Boyle as director, but let's champion the writer for a change, as he deserves. Anyone who witnessed Frank Cottrell Boyce's talk at the NAWE conference of 2008 would not have been surprised by the generosity of spirit and the narrative flair that characterized the opening ceremony he scripted.

Celebration marks achievement – often the result of considerable struggle, even sacrifice. NAWE's 25th anniversary comes at a time when the budget and staffing have been stripped right back as a result of Arts Council cuts, and yet the stories we have to tell are more positive than ever. After years of fighting to give Creative Writing its due recognition in schools, we have worked with AQA to prepare a full A-Level specification, potentially for introduction next year. This would never have come about without two things in particular: the tireless enthusiasm of freelance writers visiting schools and the academic rigour with which writers in higher education have firmly established the discipline of Creative Writing in the UK, with NAWE as Subject Association.

Those freelance writers engaged for so long as entertaining correctives to the curriculum may well soon find themselves commanding new respect as masters of the craft required within meaningful programmes of study.

Rigour – and flow

In a year when Olympic imagery has loomed so large, it seems best to embrace it rather than struggle to avoid it. There was almost as much disagreement over the merits of Anish Kapoor's Orbit sculpture as there has been over proposed changes to the curriculum. The sculpture however has two clear qualities: a strength of structure

matched by a seemingly organic flow. These are surely qualities that an education system should also enshrine. NAWE has voiced its concern about the new curricular strictures being proposed and will continue to fight for adjustments that take creativity properly into account. Of course, something as fundamentally misconceived as the



Anish Kapoor's sculpture in the London Olympic Park

'English Baccalaureate' presents an altogether bigger battle, though we support the Council for Subject Associations (of which NAWE is a member) in its efforts. Work on the A-Level is, by comparison, a more straightforward task: an opportunity to design something from the ground up and in the best possible way, potentially establishing a beacon of creative rigour from which other educational ventures might learn.

NAWE is the Subject Association for Creative Writing, aiming to further knowledge, understanding and enjoyment of Creative Writing and to support good practice in its teaching and learning at all levels.

Membership

On the 1st of January we adjusted our subscription rates, with increases both for Professional and Institutional Membership (to £65 and £195 respectively). The Associate Membership rate sustained the existing £20 rate, and e-membership was introduced at just £10. These rates were set out of necessity, following the Arts Council cut, but we do believe they represent excellent value. Those joining our organization for the first time find them entirely appropriate and our existing members (who have benefited from subsidy for many years) have understood the need for change. We are delighted that membership has increased during the past year from 1384 to 1595. Income from subscriptions for the year ending March 2012 was over £47,000, an increase of £12,000 from the previous year, and we anticipate a similar increase by next March. This represents a level of income that can sustain core membership services and enable NAWE to run a range of other projects and events that are self-financing. With reserves remaining at around £60,000, NAWE is in a stronger position than ever, and no longer reliant on subsidy.

We did put forward an offer to provide for members of NALD, the National Association for Literature Development, which also had its funding completely cut. Our offer was not taken up but we are keen to cater for the interests of former NALD members if possible. The boundaries between 'writer' and 'literature' development are becoming increasingly blurred, and the specific terminologies are probably less relevant to the newer generations of writers and readers making things happen – particularly in their use of new technology to develop new audiences.

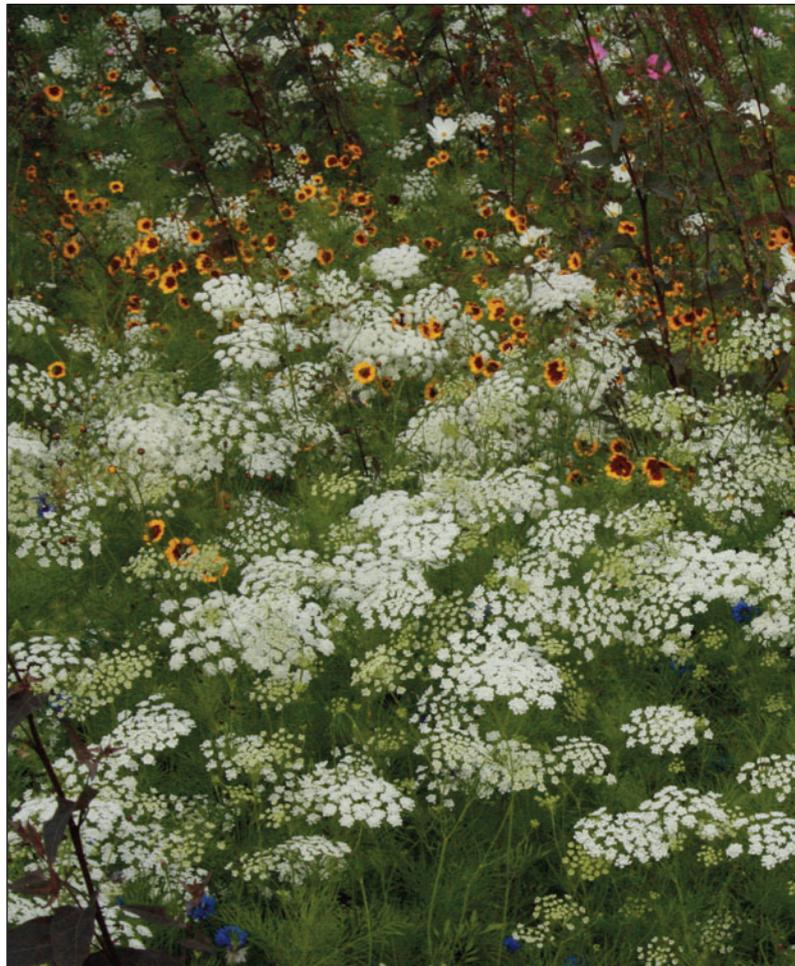
Conference

The list of eminent writers contributing to the NAWE Annual Conference continues to grow. Carol Ann Duffy and Kate Mosse were the guest speakers at our event in Northampton. This year we welcome Simon Armitage, Alan Bennett, Ian McMillan and David Morley. The conference is primarily driven, however, by the peer-learning workshops contributed by members, and this year's event has yet again expanded in order to cater for the wealth of offerings.

In Northampton, an extended AGM enabled a full discussion of the conference – its format and budget – in the post-ACE era. We're delighted that the decision to maintain the three-day residential structure has been vindicated, with this year's event entirely self-financing.

Publications

Launched at the conference was the first in a series of Creative Writing Studies titles published by the Professional & Higher Partnership, with which NAWE has a special arrangement. We are pleased to be offering the various new titles, as they become available, at a significant discount to members, with an additional royalty donated by the publisher to NAWE itself.



The Glory of the Garden: wild flowers

Conference proceedings appeared in the Spring edition of *Writing in Education*, and two further general issues followed, available for the first time as a full e-publication (though with individual articles also databased as before). The printed magazine is now only mailed to Professional Members and Institutional libraries. Copies are however available for anyone to order.

New this year was *Myths of the Near Future*, the online magazine for young writers, set up by Wes Brown. It's a pleasure to be publishing creative work in addition to our regular critical output and we are also supporting AAWP's *Meniscus* and the new short fiction site, *cutalongstory*; creative spaces in which new work can flourish.

Schools

Whilst the A-Level has stolen the headlines, much has been happening to support the ongoing work of writers in schools, including a commissioned guide to 'Getting Started' and a second Skill Sharing day that was held in Leicester. The latest edition of *Writing in Education* (No. 58) has a focus on schools, and our new reciprocal membership with NATE is set to help us work more



Flourishing in the London Olympic Park

closely with teachers. As these positive measures grow, it's frustrating to witness counterproductive initiatives such as the new Level 3 qualification for artists working with children and young people. We shall continue to work towards standards and associated training opportunities that have more relevance for writers.

The Wider Community

We believe that it is particularly important that peer learning continues to characterize professional development for writers working in all contexts. We are now halfway through our partnership project within ArtWorks: Developing Practice in Participatory Settings', a

Paul Hamlyn Foundation Special Initiative with support and funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, Creativity Culture & Education (supported by Arts Council England) and the Cultural Leadership Programme. We have just held the first of two events investigating how writers work effectively with people with dementia. These were led by John Killick, a founding NAWE member. Part of the purpose is in spreading the expertise of those whose pioneering work has achieved so much, but we are also interested in discovering what training for writers working in participatory settings is generic and what, by contrast, demands utterly specific skills and support.

NAWE first grew because writers found that their work in the community enriched their own practice. That experience has been passed on with ever greater sophistication, and our role within ArtWorks is currently working to complement that which we know works well.

Higher Education

Our HE Committee meets four times a year, addressing such matters as the Research Excellence Framework (REF), for which we are now nominating assessors. We're delighted that our link with the HE Academy remains a strong one, with Nicole King (Discipline Lead for English Literature, English Language and Creative Writing) hosting our meetings. In April, the HEA commissioned NAWE to undertake research into Creative Writing in HE. Twelve universities were selected to provide an ideal geographical spread and considerable diversity. Twenty-two others also offered to take part. We are currently preparing a report describing the state of the subject and with some indication of how the identified challenges might be met.

The NAWE directory of courses was fully updated at the same time. This demonstrated the continuing expansion, with 141 institutions offering a total of 504 degree programmes (including the various combined degrees, and a number of journalism and combined arts courses that fit the list; drawing the line is not straightforward.)

At the AWP Conference in Chicago, NAWE represented 23 UK universities and this will be repeated in Boston next year. Through these types of arrangements, invaluable to the contributing members in promoting their own programmes, NAWE fully covers the cost of its international presence – which in turn is of immense value to the organization as a whole. Our close association with AAWP in Australasia continues and this year we made contact with the new Canadian association, CCWWP, with resulting Canadian representation at our own conference.

The Writer's Compass

We heard a lot during the Olympics about 'raw talent' – a phrase used to describe natural ability that's in need of nurturing, and it surely applies as much to writers as to runners. The work of professional writers in schools and HE is invaluable, but we are also committed to providing both new and more experienced writers with the further information and tools they need to make the most of their talent. The Writer's Compass offers this (now for NAWE members only) in the form of comprehensive listings and associated services.

Wes Brown took over as Information Manager (as well as running the Young Writers' Hub) and now produces an e-bulletin every week, with details of jobs, professional development events and other opportunities for writers seeking to build and sustain their careers.

We continue to offer professional development planning sessions, one-to-one, also telephone coaching sessions. Our Retreat for writers who give so much of their time to others is as popular as ever, and the Coaching Course in partnership with the Arvon Foundation gathers ever more plaudits. This ongoing programme has been complemented by newly-devised one-day events, focusing on particular contexts. We are pleased to have run these once again in partnership with Writing West Midlands.

New resources have been commissioned, including 'Getting Started' guides for writers in the community and writers in residence. We have also secured new funding from Creative Scotland to run 'Turning Another Page', a further, one-year professional development programme for writers living and working in Scotland, aimed especially (but not solely) at those who have studied on a university writing programme or are at an early stage in their writing careers. Philippa Johnston, former Director of the Writer's Compass, will act as Project Manager.

Young Writers' Hub

The Enabling Fund for young writers is a legacy of previous Arts Council support. This year it has assisted some terrific new ventures, such as the *Front Lines* Anthology, which will showcase the writing of six new young writers and make use of the Hub website and social media to promote the publication. Other awards have been lower key but also important, helping young writers to gain the professional development opportunities that matter to them most. Some of the beneficiaries have contributed to Hub projects such as the *Myths of the Near Future* magazine. Our Hub Co-ordinator has provided a crusading presence at literary festivals and other events, championing the possibilities of digital media in particular.



The Olympic cauldron, London 2012

The Team

Fewer staff, paid to work for fewer hours, has presented its challenges for an organization with a growing membership with increasing needs. Thanks are due to Clare Mallorie, Anne Caldwell, Wes Brown and Gill Greaves for all their work – not only in maintaining 'business as usual' but in expanding our operation to a level that could not have been imagined 25 years ago.

Further change is imminent, as the time has come to elect a new Committee for the coming three years. Those standing for election, in specific roles relating to levels of education or areas of work, nevertheless demonstrate broad experience and expertise, confirming the notion that writers do not tend to operate in one area only.

I would like to thank Maggie Butt and all the outgoing committee for their support over the past three years (and more). Maggie's leadership and the dedication of the committee have been crucial to the way in which NAWE has thrived over a challenging period, and we owe them our deepest gratitude.

Paul Munden, October 2012



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